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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the polysemic nature of prepositions in pidgins and creoles (PCs) looks at the analytic nature of PCs and the pervasive variability in their grammars, and then focuses on usage of the preposition 'fo" in Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin (ANP), likely borrowed from the English "for." It is argued that while this is not the only preposition in ANP, its usage in various contexts where other more "natural" languages normally employ distinct prepositions can be attributed to the lexical restriction common to PCs. The analysis looks at how "fo" is capable of differential signification when it possesses basically the same sense in all prepositional contexts, and what inherent meaning it has that can explain its semantic versatility. It is concluded that in ANP grammar, while the presence of prepositions could b pertinent in certain contexts, it does not appear to be primary for signification, and that prepositions tend to "grow" in a language as it develops through elaboration, with prepositional specialization setting in later. It also supports the notion that prepositions are one of the regular victims of language structural reduction, arguing for the role of "fo" as a prepositional jack-of-all-trades. Contains 15 references. (MSE)

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POLYSEMIC FUNCTIONALITY OF PREPOSITIONS IN PIDGINS & CREOLES: THE CASE OF 'FỌ̀' IN ANGLO-NIGERIAN PIDGIN

Charles C. Mann

"... languages will tend to change to meet the new conditions. If new terms are required they will be incorporated in the vocabulary; whether by 'borrowing' them from other languages or by forming them from existing elements in the vocabulary by the productive resources of the language." (John Lyons 1968:43)

1.0. Introduction

Languages are typically categorized into 'isolating' or 'analytic' (e.g. Vietnamese), agglutinating (e.g. Turkish) or flexional (e.g. Latin) varieties. While the latter two categories share a common feature of demonstrating their interrelationships by 'building around' or modifying the relevant word-roots through affixations and declensions, the first category (i.e the analytic type) is so-called because it would rather employ separate and invariable function-words to do so. According to Lyons (1968:188), "the average degree of 'isolation' can be expressed as a ratio of the number of phonemes over the number of words: the lower the ratio, the more highly isolating is the language." Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin (ANP) being an analytic language, the latter category will be our focus of attention in this paper, moreso given that prepositions, i.e "that class of invariable words, or particles, which had a 'grammatical' or 'local' function and which ... tend to occur immediately before the noun or noun-phrase they modify," are a 'free' and regular feature of analytic languages.

The study of pidgin and creole languages (PCs) has led, over time, to the elaboration of 'abnormal' linguistic characteristics commonly associated with this typology (cf. Hymes 1971, Valdman 1977). Three features will retain our attention in the course of this paper: the 'analytic' nature of PCs, the pervading variability in their grammars, and especially the polysemic functionality of prepositions – primarily *fọ̀*.

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2.1. Anglo-Nigerian Pidgin

ANP is an English-related West African Atlantic pidgin about 500 years old, with probably one major occurrence of relexification (from Portuguese towards English). ANP took root, in terms of European-relatedness, on the southern

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shores of Nigeria – the then 'slave coast', through regular contacts with the Portuguese, followed by other European traders, adventurers, and missionaries: the British, French and Dutch. It has been promoted in multi-ethnic urban centres (e.g. Lagos, Benin, Kaduna, Yola), and is well-entrenched as a primary language, especially with the youth, in Warri, Sapẹlẹ and Effurum.

One of the problems in analyzing ANP is deciding on the variant which will serve as the basis of the data since the language possesses no acknowledged standard and is characterized by a high degree of surface structure variability. Although certain Yoruba words and expressions have gained permanent currency in ANP (e.g. *nkọ?* 'and then?, so what?', *abi?* 'isn't it?') due to the predominance of Yorubas in Lagos, Nigeria's capital, the model of ANP used in this paper is a 'common core', bereft of any superfluous non-generalized regional input. It would be understood without difficulty by the 'regular' speaker of ANP. The orthography here is largely phonology-based and represents a forthcoming proposal for a standardisation of ANP.

2.0. fọ̀

2.1. fọ̀: Origin and Nature

fọ̀ was likely borrowed from English *for* and then indigenously rephonologized to [fɔ̀]. It is difficult to date its first usage in ANP, but its appearance must have coincided with a stage of morpho-syntactic elaboration in surface structure. It is also possible to regard it, especially in recent usage, as an index of decreolization.

In regard to the nature and functionality of *fọ̀* in ANP, first there is a tendency for a final 'r' to occur when *fọ̀* precedes a word-initial vowel, and for the two forms involved to combine in a clitic-like effect.

1) Hú no *fòr-am*? [hu no fɔ̀ram]
'Who can understand what he/she is up to?'

Second, while *fọ̀* serves principally as a preposition, it also has other functions such as a modal verb in conditional constructions; these contexts will be mentioned further on.

2.2. fọ̀ as a Polysemic Preposition

While *fọ̀* is not the only preposition in ANP, its usage in various contexts where other more 'natural' languages normally employ distinct prepositions can be attributed to the lexical restriction common to PCs. A number of quite natural questions arise with its polysemic functionality as a single preposition – since it also quite often optionally precedes a number of prepositional constructions. Some of these include (a.) if *fọ̀* possesses, basically, the same **sense** in all its prepositional contexts, how then is it capable of triggering *differential signification*?, and (b.) what is the inherent meaning of *fọ̀* that can explain its semantactic versatility vis-à-vis other prepositional paradigms?

The context and examples of the polysemic functionality of *fọ* in the following subsections are not meant to be exhaustive; they will simply illustrate the more frequent and elementary uses of *fọ* in ANP. In the examples where *fọ* is bracketed, it means that it is optional and probably of recent usage.

2.2.1. fọ used as 'for'. We shall first examine *fọ* in contexts where it formally coincides with English *for*. In (2), *fọ* is preposed within the nominalized object complement 'to wait for me' to introduce an inner indirect object 'me'.

2) A sé mék hi/hin wet *fọ* mi.
'I asked him/her to wait for me,'

fọ in (3) introduces the modifier to the titular attribute *di seneto* in the sense of 'representative of' or 'representing'.

3) Nà hin bi di sẹnetọ *fọ* awa eria.
'He/she is the senator for our area/district.'

In (4), *fọ* signifies 'in exchange for' or 'as the price for'.

4) Nà tu naira à giv am fọ dis buk.
'I gave him/her two naira for this book.'

In the final example, *fọ* is optional and is used to indicate a period of time.

5) Wi sté dia (fọ) tú dé.
'We stayed there for two days.'

(5) implies (it will also be the case for other examples in which *fọ* is optional) that (6) below is not likely to cause any confusion in meaning, and can be regarded as more 'authentic' ANP.

6) Wi sté dia tú dé.

2.2.2. fọ used as 'of'. *fọ* is often used as 'of' to indicate possession, appartenance, or to introduce a modifier. In the first role in (7) and (8), *fọ* is mandatory:

7) Dat buk, nà fọ John.
'That is John's book.'

8) Anti Karo bi di junio sístà *fọ* mai papa.
'Aunt Karo is my father's younger sister'.

In the case of (7), and depending on the context, it could also mean 'this is the book for John' (i.e. 'meant to be given to John'). With (8), while it is possible in ANP to have another (more directly possessive) construction with the same meaning as in (9):

9) Anti Karo bi mai papa-hin sístà.

(8) is more analytic and explicative; the preference of one over the other would normally depend on the objectives and motivations of the speaker in a given context.

In the final case, *fọ mai klas* modifies *di tísà* 'the teacher'.

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10) Dis nà di tíṣà *fò* mai klas.
'This is my class teacher.'

In regard to *fò*, it would once again appear that it is obligatory in this context since (11), which is semantically identical, is not a regular construction in ANP and is a result of decreolization (towards English).

11) ?Dis nà mai klas tíṣà.

2.2.3. fò used as 'at' (Spatial and Temporal Locative). *fò* can optionally appear before an adverb of place:

12) John dé (*fò*) skul.
'John is at school.'

As in a similar construction in (17) below where *fò* is used to indicate locative 'at', existential *dé* must be present.

13) *Tina nọ bi fò haus.

dé should also not be confused with *bi*, which lends itself more to attributive constructions.

14) Tina bi gẹl
'Tina is a girl.'

In its temporal use, *fò* can indicate the time (hour) as in (15):

15) A tẹl am mék hi/hin kọm fò trí ò'klók.
'I told him/her to come at 3 o'clock.'

Apart from this specific temporal use, it could also be used to relatively situate an event in time:

16) Dat nà di bọi wé wi si *fò* di pati.
'That is the boy we saw at the party.'

2.2.4. fò used as 'in' (Spatial and Temporal Locative). The use of *fò* to indicate 'in' could, in certain contexts, lead to some confusion of interpretation.

17) Hi dé (*fò*) di haus.
'He/she/it is *at/in* the house.'

This is not the case when (smaller) nominals are referred to:

18) Di tin dé (*fò*) di bọks/bag.
'The thing is in the box/bag.'

A specifier would normally be needed in (17) to indicate not just the location, but also the position. Such a specifier usually takes the form of another preposition (e.g. *insai(d)*), which could be preceded by *fò* to form a prepositional complex *(fò) insai(d)*. The question of complex prepositions will be discussed later.

fò can also serve to indicate 'in' in the temporal locative sense, i.e. period of day (e.g. morning, afternoon, evening, night), specific weeks, months of the year and seasons:

19) Nà *fọ̀* aftanun à dè gó (*fọ̀*) skul.
'I go to school *in* the afternoon.'

20) Mọskito plẹnti tú mọs *fọ̀* reni sizin.
'There are too many mosquitoes *in* the rainy season.'

2.2.5. *fọ̀ used as 'on' (Spatial Locative [Positional] and Temporal).* In this context, as in quite a number, the interpretation of *fọ̀* when used as 'on' is mainly determined by the type of nominal in the string, plus the semantic instincts of the listener at the notional level. In the following example:

21) Di buk dé (*fọ̀*) tébul.
'The book is *on* the table.'

the listener's notional and experiential sense leads to the assumption, in the absence of any further specification, that the most usual position for an object to be in relation to a table is *on* it.

fọ̀ also indicates a temporal 'on', as in:

22) A rọn kọm bak (*fọ̀*) di fẹst dé à gó skul.
'I ran back [home] *on* my first day at school.'

This sentence, while still somewhat rare, is not unheard of in the on-going process of elaboration (or decreolization?).

2.2.6. *fọ̀ used as 'to' (Spatial Directional).* The final and main example of the multiple usage of *fọ̀* as an ANP preposition examined here relates to the spatial (directional) preposition 'to' as in

23) Mama sẹn(d) am gó (fọ̀) makẹt.
'Mama sent him/her to the market.'

This is a typical instance where *fọ̀* appears optionally because the verb of predication suggests movement in a direction – in this case towards the market. It is even possible to have a 'border-line' case like:

24) ?Anna sẹn(d) kék *fọ̀* mí.
'Anna sent me some cake.'

instead of the more regular:

25) Anna sẹn(d) mí kék.

Notice, however, that the presence of *fọ̀* in (24) is necessary to overtly indicate the relationship between the direct and indirect objects *kék* and *mí*.

A further consideration is the use of *to* or ø as in (26) and (27) instead of *fọ̀* in (28).

26) Ade tro di bọl *to* John.
'Ade threw the ball to John.'

27) Bisi rait mí lẹ́tà.
'Bisi wrote a letter to me.'

28) Bigi rait lẹ́tà *fọ̀* mi.
'Bisi wrote a letter on my behalf.'

ANP seems to have disambiguated the two contexts (i.e. (26-27) vs. (28)) by inverting the normal order of the direct and indirect objects in the first case, while allowing for *fǫ* to appear compulsorily in the second (incidently, with a different interpretation).

However, *fǫ*, in representing 'to', does not occur in temporal (directional) constructions as in (29):

29) The lecture holds from one *to* two o'clock.

ANP makes use of a different preposition for this purpose, *ris* (roughly 'to') as in (30).

30) Di lęktşǫ nà frǫm wǫ̀n *riş* tú ɔ̀klǫ́k.

The reason is that the use of *riş* 'to' is probably more extential than it is directional in this context. Similarly, *riş* is preferred to *fǫ* in spatial (extential) constructions, as in (31):

31) Wi wàkà frǫm haus *riş* skul
'We walked from home to school.'

2.3. Prepositional Complexes (with fǫ) in ANP

Constructions with prepositional complexes do occur in ANP, with *fǫ* usually preceding a 'locative-positional' preposition[1] as in (32-33) below:

32) Mai bag dé *(fǫ)insai(d)* ka.
'My bag is inside the car.'

33) Polis stéşǫ̀n dé *(fǫ)bihain(d)* àwà haus.
'There is a police station behind our house.'

Other such complex prepositions in ANP are *(fǫ)bisai(d), (fǫ)ǫnda, (fǫ)ǫntǫp(of), (fǫ)in frǫnt of*, etc.

Two remarks need to be made here. In the first place, in the absence of the locative (or positional) preposition *insai(d)* in (32), the sentence will simply be interpreted as in (34) with or without the presence of *fǫ*.

34) 'My bag is *in* the car.'

In the absence of any further specification, the most usual and logical place *my bag* would or should be (around the car) is *in* it (cf. also Bennett 1975:55: *John fell over the cliff, John fell over the kerb*). Therefore, *insai(d)* is basically used as a supplement of specification, and this, in itself, indicates a certain progression of elaboration in the language.

Second, in the form of certain prepositional complexes in ANP, e.g. *in frǫnt of, ǫntǫp(of)*, notice that the English preposition *of*, which does not have independent status, can sometimes be found *en bloc*. It would thus seem that constructions such as **in frǫnt fǫ*, or **ǫntǫp(fǫ)* are not yet grammatically admissible. It would also seem that the nominal group following *fǫ* in (32) (i.e *insai(d) ká*) is interpreted – and rightly so – as one nominal.

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2.4. Other Prepositions in ANP

As mentioned earlier, *fọ* is not the only preposition in ANP even if it is the most regularly and variously employed. Apart from those cited in the preceding subsection, *wit* as in (35-36):

35) Hi bit am *wit* stik. ablative
36) A dè gó pati *wit* John. comitative

and *frọm, sins* 'since', *til* 'until' are also used, as are *áftà, bifọ, amọng, bitwin, nia*, etc. – the latter occurring optionally with *fọ* in prepositional complexes. Naturally, all these words have their origin in English vocabulary and have been indigenously rephonologized.

2.5. Other (functional) Uses of fọ in ANP

Principally used grammatically as a preposition in ANP, *fọ* is likewise employed as a modal in conditional constructions (of the past), as in (37).

37) If (tò) sé à nó, à *fọ* nọ́ bọn plẹnti pikin.
'Had I known, I would not have borne many children.'

(*fọ* and *nọ́* are positionally interchangeable without any significant difference in meaning.)

In addition, and on the strength of its function as a preposition, *fọ* is an optional 'co-interrogative particle' in *wh*-constructions:

38) (*fọ*) wia yù dé sins?
'Where have you been (all this time)?

Other examples are *(fọ)hú?, (fọ)wétin?*, etc.'

3.0. Implications of the Prepositional Comportment of fọ in ANP

Given the preceding data on *fọ*, this section will attempt to interpret its multi-prepositional role in terms of possible theoretical implications for the study of PC grammars, the elaboration process in language development, and, more directly, the place of prepositions in the workings of linguistic systems. Some of these implications are itemized below:

(A) The fact that ANP *fọ* is variously employed in a prepositional role to denote internotional relationships where other 'normal' languages use different prepositions so to do, and because of its optional status at the surface-structural level in most of these contexts, confirms linguists' general belief that prepositions are relatively 'dispensable' in language structure, especially in situations of minimal communication. It would be interesting, though, to follow the development of ANP prepositions so as to determine when, why, and to what extent a role specialization sets in. The relevance of this last remark will become clearer in (E) below.

(B) The wide surface-structural variability of *fọ* in ANP grammar is symptomatic of the emergent system of ANP, and is an indicator that it already has a place in the deep structure.

(C) While it is largely true that prepositions basically serve the purpose of imposing a "certain 'form', or organisation" (Lyons 1968:273) in grammar, the statement seems difficult to accept as being wholly so. There are some contexts in which the absence of a preposition – even in ANP – creates 'dysfunctional' vagueness (and/or ambiguity) as in (39):

39) ?Mai mama stan(d) (Ø) haus.
'?*My mother is standing house.'

It is practically impossible to deduce the meaning of this sentence **without** a specifying preposition, and the latter could, in this context, be *fọ̀, (fọ̀) insai(d), (fọ̀) autsai(d), bisai(d) (di), in frọnt ọf, bihain(d) (di), ọntọp*. What this implies is that the presence of prepositions can be **necessary** for grammaticalisation and meaning deduction, and even if its functional role is still regarded by some as one of 'fine-tuning' the semantic links between the constitutive notions of the utterance, the fact of the matter is that an utterance like (39) above simply makes *no sense* without a preposition.

(D) So, what *sense(s)* can we honestly attribute to *fọ̀* in the light of its multi-prepositional usage, and why is *fọ̀* 'the chosen one' amongst the prepositions available, and/or are the former and latter questions interrelated? As regards the first question, we shall consider the sense of *fọ̀* as "its place in a system of relationships which it contracts with other words in the vocabulary" (Lyons 1968:427). Wood (1967) recognized 21 senses of *for* and Lindkvist (1950) eight purely spatial senses of *to*. Given the fact that *fọ̀* is a preposition, it is quite difficult to state categorically and concisely what it means in isolation (*Gesamtbedeutungen*: cf. Jakobson 1932) given that it would seem to derive its semantic vitality essentially in a given context. Apart from those contexts where its appearance is obligatory for grammaticalisation, would one be right to consider it as actually being 'polysemous'? It could either be considered as encompassing a set of possible meanings – the appropriate one being evoked in the right context – or it could be regarded as having a Ø sense (in those contexts of optional application) and serving as a sort of 'grammatical dummy', evoking no other meaning than the one: 'preposition'.

40) A gó (*prep.*) skul yéstàdé.

In other words, it would seem to fill a (deep structure) cage of prepositional need, deriving its meaning from the specific context (*sonderbedeutung*), based on the speakers' deictic interpretation of the utterance.

How, then, does one explain the fact that *fọ̀* has been selected to play this multi-prepositional role from among the other prepositions available? One possible interpretation is that it is the most 'neutral' and 'general' of the lot in terms of sense, but this remains speculation. The other interpretation is that it has a semolexemic coincidence with a preposition of the substrata in ANP, which is used in similar fashion in the indigenous languages that have an input in ANP structure. A

third interpretation is that speakers of the substratal languages simply 'latched onto' one of the prepositions they seemed to notice more in the speech of the superstrate language speakers they came in contact with, and attributed to it its present multi-prepositional role. The search for the most valid interpretation is beyond the scope of this paper.

(E) Some would regard *fọ̀* as an index of ANP decreolization (towards English) and consider ANP elaboration, to the point of introducing prepositions, as a move in the direction of English. While *fọ̀* is clearly an index of elaboration in ANP structure, the truth is that it would seem to be responding more to substratal structure (at least in terms of its multi-prepositional usage). A cursory examination of Yoruba – one of the Kwa languages more regularly associated with Atlantic PCs – shows that the preposition *ni* plays a similar multi-prepositional role as *fọ̀*, even in prepositional complexes (*(ni)ẹ̀yin, (ni)ẹgbẹ̀, (ni)wajú*, etc.). This could very well mean that *fọ̀*, borrowed from English *for*, is then attributed a similar role as *ni*. The table below shows that *ni* is used in six (out of ten) prepositional roles attributed to *fọ̀*; whereas Yoruba cannot be said today to be at the same level of reduction as ANP, the former is considered a full 'natural' language. It would therefore appear that while *fọ̀* is an adapted borrowing from English, its grammatical role is directed by the substratal grammatical structure; this would explain why its prepositional comportment is quite different from that of *for* in English. Our finding in this subsection would consequently give more credence to the second interpretation of the status and origin of *fọ̀* in (D).

Prep. type	Equivalent in English	Terminal Status	Equivalent in Yoruba
Modifier particle:	*for*	Compuls.	*(fún)*
	of	Compuls.	*(Ø)*
Locative:	*at* (spatial)	optional	*ni*
	(temporal)	compuls.	*ni*
	in (spatial)	optional	*ni*
	(temporal)	compuls.	*ni*
	on (spatial)	optional	*ni*
	(temporal)	optional	*ni*
	to (spatial) (directional)	optional	*(sí)*
Complex prepositions:	*(fọ̀)insai(d)*	optional	*(ni) inu*
	(fọ̀)bihain(d)	optional	*(ni) ẹ̀yin*

Figure 1: Correspondences of fọ̀ *with English and Yoruba prepositions, and terminal statuses.*

4.0. Conclusion

The primary intention in this paper is expository and illustrative, as regards the origin and comportment of *fọ̀* in ANP, and has been an attempt to explain its multi-prepositional functionality. The limits imposed on this paper cannot permit it to deal adequately with all the issues raised, nor with even more immediate concerns of a componential analysis of *fọ̀*, nor with its semolexemic tactics. These matters, however, form a basis for further research and study.

Our analysis of ANP grammar clearly confirms both that while the presence of prepositions could be pertinent in certain contexts, it does not appear to be primary for signification, and that prepositions tend to 'grow' in a language as it develops through elaboration, with prepositional specialization setting in later. This probably further confirms the belief that in circumstances of sharp constraints to communication, prepositions are one of the regular victims of language structural reduction. This could also be interpreted in terms of **economy of language**. *fọ̀* can now be considered a linguistically 'wholly system-integrated unit' at this stage of ANP development; it serves, all things considered, basically as a prepositional *passe-partout*.

The last word, which could sum up the *raison d'être* of *fọ̀*, in the context of language structure and language development, goes appropriately to Lyons (1968: 405):

> The ideal language ... would be one in which each form had only one meaning and each meaning was associated with only one form. But this 'ideal' is probably not realized by any natural language.

NOTES

1. The term *locative-positional* is added here to differentiate the forms in question from simple spatial locatives. The 'locative-positional' forms give specifications of location in relation to some other location or landmark.

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